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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to examine the usefulness of survey results and the ways in which the results were used, and to gather recommendations for improving the surveys and/or the reports. The Student Satisfaction Survey (SSS) was developed to assess undergraduate students' attitudes toward their major areas, their departments, and the University of Alabama. The survey was administered to juniors and seniors enrolled in programs (majors) that were preparing for a 5-year program review or for re-accreditation by an external crediting agency. Results of the survey were provided to all deans and department chairpersons in the programs involved. A second survey instrument, the Graduate Student Satisfaction Survey (GSSS), was administered to graduate students in programs preparing for program review or re-accreditation. To determine the usefulness of the results of these two surveys, questionnaires were mailed to each program chair who had received a report from either the SSS or GSSS; 13 of the 18 questionnaires mailed to undergraduate report recipients and 10 of the 15 questionnaires mailed to graduate report recipients were returned. Responses indicate that information provided to department administrators from the administration of the surveys to students was useful. Items dealing with courses, the faculty, and the department were viewed as more useful than were those focusing on university services and student background characteristics. The most common use of the results was in preparing for re-accreditation or a University of Alabama program review. Twelve data tables are provided. The student survey instruments are appended. (TJH)

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Student Satisfaction Survey: One Component of Institutional Effectiveness at The University of Alabama

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INTRODUCTION

The Student Satisfaction Survey was developed to assess undergraduate students' attitudes toward various aspects of their major areas, their departments, and The University of Alabama (UA) as a whole. The survey was administered to juniors and seniors enrolled in programs (majors) that were preparing for a UA five year program review or for re-accreditation by an external accrediting agency. Results of the survey were provided to all deans and department chairpersons in the programs involved. The survey was administered during spring semester 1988 and spring semester 1989. The next administration is scheduled for fall semester 1989 for the programs in one college and for spring semester 1990 for the other programs.

A second survey instrument was developed to assess the satisfaction of graduate students with aspects of their programs, departments, and UA. The Graduate Student Satisfaction Survey was administered during spring semester 1989 to graduate students in the programs preparing for a UA program review or for re-accreditation. Reports generated from the survey were similar to those produced for the undergraduate version of the instrument and were distributed to the same audience.

Reports for the spring 1989 administration of the undergraduate and graduate versions of the survey were presented to the appropriate administrators during the summer. The reports were distributed and discussed at separate meetings for each college. The dean of each college was allowed to arrange the meeting and invite program chairpersons and/or other faculty members to attend.

Although the Evaluation and Assessment Laboratory had examined the results of the first administrations of the surveys and had revised the survey

based on the findings, there had been no systematic feedback from report recipients concerning the usefulness of the information provided in the reports. This paper presents a study conducted to examine the usefulness of the survey results and the ways in which the results were used, and to gather recommendations for improving the surveys and/or the reports.

METHOD

Two short questionnaires were designed to collect information from report recipients. The questionnaires were similar in format; one addressing the undergraduate version of the survey and the other addressing the graduate version. The first item on each survey asked the report recipient to rate the usefulness of the information from different sections of the survey (e.g., courses, faculty, advising, background information). The next two questions examined the ways the recipient used the information in the report and the audience(s) to which the results were presented. One question ascertained the section(s) of the report that were most useful while another question was concerned with the sections the recipient found least useful. The final question on the instrument asked the recipient what could be included on the survey or in the report to make the information more useful. Copies of the questionnaires appear in the Appendix.

Questionnaires were mailed to each program chair who had received a report from either the undergraduate or graduate version of the Student Satisfaction Survey during the summer. A cover letter explained the purpose of the questionnaire and requested that the completed instrument be returned within approximately one week. Data from the completed questionnaires were coded and frequency tables were prepared for each of the questionnaire items.

RESULTS

Of the 18 questionnaires mailed to undergraduate report recipients, 13 were returned. Ten of the 15 graduate report recipients returned completed questionnaires. Results on the questionnaire completed by undergraduate report recipients will be presented first followed by results from the questionnaire addressing the graduate reports.

Student Satisfaction Survey

The most useful section on the undergraduate report was the section dealing with the student's major and department (see Table 1). The items on this section of the survey focused on the quality of upper level courses in the major, the performance of the faculty in the student's department, quality of curricular and career advising, and the adequacy of classroom, computer, and library facilities for supporting the instructional program. The section dealing with university services and facilities and the section providing background information on the students were not found to be as useful.

Table 2 presents information detailing the ways the report recipients used the survey results. Nearly forty percent of the respondents had included the survey results in a report to an accrediting agency. Many of the respondents used the results for program planning or in planning for a UA program review. The audiences to whom the results were presented are listed in Table 3. Over 60% of the report recipients had disseminated the complete report to all faculty members while approximately 8% had presented faculty members with a summary of the results contained in the report. Nearly one quarter of the recipients forwarded the complete report to a departmental review or planning committee. While only 15% of the respondents indicated they had disseminated a summary of the report to an accrediting agency, the

data in Table 2 imply that some of the data in the report must have been used in preparing reports required by accrediting agencies.

When given a chance to list the most useful items/sections on the survey in an open ended format, over half the respondents identified the items addressing the quality of courses and instruction (see Table 4). Nearly half the respondents identified items dealing with the performance of faculty members as most useful. Items assessing the adequacy of classroom, computer and library facilities were listed as most important by over 30% of the respondents. A small percentage of the respondents identified the university services and student background sections of the survey as least useful (see Table 5). Most of the respondents, however, did not identify any items or sections as not useful.

The final item on the questionnaire asked the respondents what additional information would have been useful in the Student Satisfaction Survey or in the report (see Table 6). Each recommendation occurred only once and several of the respondents indicated that they felt the survey and/or report were useful with no additions.

Graduate Student Satisfaction Survey

The graduate student version of the survey was divided into six sections (See Table 7). The sections dealing with courses in the major, faculty advising, and the department were judged to be useful or very useful by over half the respondents. A large number of respondents rated the sections focusing on the student's decision to attend UA, graduate school/university services, and student background information as not useful or only somewhat useful.

Forty percent of the respondents had used the survey results in a report or self study required by an accrediting agency (see Table 8). Program planning was a use cited by 20% of the respondents while another 20% indicated that they had not yet used the results or did not respond to the item.

Of those recipients disseminating results of the survey, 50% had provided the complete report to all faculty members, and 20% had provided faculty members with a summary of the results in the report. (see Table 9). The quality of courses and instruction and the performance of the faculty were the items judged to be most important. A sizeable percentage of the respondents also felt that information on classroom, computer, and library facilities was useful (see Table 10). Only one recipient responded to the item concerning information that was not useful. That respondent did not find the student background information to be useful (see Table 11). Only three recommendations were made concerning information that should be added to the reports. These recommendations are listed in Table 12.

SUMMARY

Overall, the information provided to department administrators from the administration of the Student Satisfaction Survey and the Graduate Student Satisfaction Survey was judged to be useful. Items dealing with courses, the faculty and the department were seen as more useful than those focusing on university services and student background characteristics. The most common use of the results was in preparing for re-accreditation or a UA program review. The report recipients indicated they disseminated the results of the survey to faculty members by providing a copy of the complete report or by presenting the report contents in summary form.

Table 1

Usefulness of Information on the Survey

Section of Report	Not Useful N	%	Somewhat Useful N	%	Useful N	%	Very Useful N	%	No Response N	%
Your Major/Department	0	0.0	5	38.5	3	23.1	5	38.5	0	0.0
The University	1	7.7	7	53.8	3	23.1	2	15.4	0	0.0
Background Information	2	15.4	7	53.8	2	15.4	2	15.4	0	0.0

Table 2

How the Information on the Survey was Used

N	%	Response
5	38.5	For accrediting agency report or self study
4	30.8	For program planning
3	23.1	For UA program review
3	23.1	As general information
2	15.4	For assessing program weaknesses
1	7.7	As a model for developing an alumni survey instrument

Notes: Total N = 13.
Respondents could list more than one use.

Table 3

How and to Whom Survey Results were Presented

N	%	Response
8	61.5	Complete report to all faculty members
3	23.1	Complete report to a review or planning committee
2	15.4	Summary of results to an accrediting agency
1	7.7	Summary of results to faculty members
1	7.7	Summary used in annual report to UA administration
1	7.7	No response

Notes: Total N = 13.
Respondents could list more than one method/audience.

Table 4

Items or Sections that were Most Useful

N	%	Response
7	53.8	Quality of courses and instruction in the major
6	46.2	Performance of faculty members in the department
4	30.8	Adequacy of classroom, computer, and library facilities
3	23.1	Quality of curricular and career advising
2	15.4	Student background information

Notes: Total N = 13.
Respondents could list more than one section.

Table 5

Items or Sections that were Not Useful

N	%	Response
3	23.1	Section on University services and facilities
2	15.4	Student background section

Notes: Total N = 13.
Respondents could list more than one section.

Table 6

Additional Information that Would have been Useful

N	%	Response
1	7.7	More personal comments (open ended questions)
1	7.7	Response rates[1]
1	7.7	Number of responses (N) to each item[2]
1	7.7	Comparison of results to prior years[3]

Notes: Total N = 13.

[1]Response rates are calculated and can be added to the reports.

[2]Only percentages are printed for each item. However, the total number of surveys comprising the report is printed and can be used to calculate the number of responses.

[3]Only majors/programs preparing for a UA program review or re-accreditation are involved in the survey. Year to year comparisons are not meaningful for a major or program.

Table 7

Usefulness of Information on the Survey

Section of Report	Not Useful N	%	Somewhat Useful N	%	Useful N	%	Very Useful N	%	No Response N	%
Courses in the Major	1	9.1	4	36.4	3	27.3	3	27.3	0	0.0
Faculty Advising	1	9.1	4	36.4	3	27.3	3	27.3	0	0.0
Student's Department	1	9.1	4	36.4	3	27.3	3	27.3	0	0.0
Decision to Attend UA	1	9.1	6	54.5	1	9.1	2	18.2	1	9.1
Grad School/University	2	18.2	6	54.5	1	9.1	1	9.1	1	9.1
Background Information	2	18.2	6	54.5	0	0.0	2	18.2	1	9.1

Note: One respondent circled two adjacent ratings for each item (e.g., "1" and "2"). The responses were counted in both rating categories.

Table 8

How the Information on the Survey was Used

N	%	Response
4	40.0	For accrediting agency report or self study
2	20.0	For program planning
2	20.0	Not used/no response
1	10.0	For UA program review
1	10.0	For assessing program weaknesses
1	10.0	Used in annual report to UA administration

Notes: Total N = 10.
Respondents could list more than one use.

Table 9

How and to Whom Survey Results were Presented

N	%	Response
5	50.0	Complete report to all faculty members
2	20.0	Summary of results to all faculty members
1	10.0	Complete report to a review or planning committee
1	10.0	Summary used in annual UA report
1	10.0	Not used/no response

Notes: Total N = 10.
Respondents could list more than one method/audience.

Table 10

Items or Sections that were Most Useful

N	%	Response
6	60.0	Quality of courses and instruction in the major
4	40.0	Performance of faculty members in the department
3	30.0	Adequacy of classroom, computer, and library facilities
2	20.0	Quality of advising

Notes: Total N = 10.
Respondents could list more than one section.

Table 11

Items or Sections that were Not Useful

N	%	Response
1	10.0	Student background section

Notes: Total N = 10.
Respondents could list more than one section.

Table 12

Additional Information that Would have been Useful

N	%	Response
1	7.7	Number of responses (N) to each item[1]
1	7.7	Separate results for two majors in the department[2]
1	7.7	Separate results for masters and doctoral candidates[3]

Notes: Total N = 10.

[1]Only percentages are printed for each item. However, the total number of surveys comprising the report is printed and can be used to calculate the number of responses.

[2]The number of students responding from each major was less than ten, therefore, only a departmental report was generated.

[3]Degree information is available and the results can be reported by degree. However, this may not be useful for the majority of report recipients.

APPENDIX

Undergraduate Student Satisfaction Survey Follow-up Questionnaire

Name _____

School/College _____

1. How useful to you was the information in the different sections of the survey?

   1 = Not Useful 2 = Somewhat Useful 3 = Useful 4 = Very Useful

Section 1: Your Major/Department	1	2	3	4
Section 2: The University	1	2	3	4
Section 3: Background Information	1	2	3	4

2. How did you use the information on the Survey (e.g to prepare for program review, to prepare for re-accreditation, to make decisions concerning instructional programs)?

3. To whom did you present the results and how did you present them?

4. Which items did you find most helpful or informative?

5. Which items do you feel were not useful and could be eliminated?

6. What information did you *not* see on the survey that you would have liked to have obtained?

Graduate Student Satisfaction Survey Follow-up Questionnaire

Name _____

School/College _____

1. How useful to you was the information in the different sections of the survey?

   1 = Not Useful 2 = Somewhat Useful 3 = Useful 4 = Very Useful

Section 1: Your Courses	1	2	3	4
Section 2: Faculty Advising	1	2	3	4
Section 3: Your Department	1	2	3	4
Section 4: Your Decision to Attend UA	1	2	3	4
Section 5: The Graduate School and The University	1	2	3	4
Section 6: Background Information	1	2	3	4

2. How did you use the information on the Survey (e.g. to prepare for program review, to prepare for re-accreditation, to make decisions concerning instructional programs)?

3. To whom did you present the results and how did you present them?

4. Which items did you find most helpful or informative?

5. Which items do you feel were not useful and could be eliminated?

6. What information did you *not* see on the survey that you would have liked to have obtained?